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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001753

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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT TARGETS STREET GANGS FOR "NATIONAL SERVICE"

REF: KINSHASA 1740

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Government authorities plan to transport several hundred allegedly criminal homeless adults and children to rural areas for agricultural work or schooling following their detention in the aftermath of November 11 violence in Kinshasa (reftel). The Minister of the Interior outlined the plan and appealed for assistance at a November 13 meeting with MONUC human rights officials, who expressed concern about the legality of the process. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) DRC Interior Minister Denis Kalume and Kinshasa Governor Baudouin Liwanga announced a plan November 13 to transport several hundred homeless people to rural locations for "social training" in the aftermath of three hours of violence on November 11, which included firefights between militia loyal to Vice President Jean-Pierre Bemba and police and other security forces (reftel). The violence is widely believed to have been precipitated by gangs of young men, known locally as "shegues," in the pay of hardline Bemba allies.

¶3. (SBU) Minister Kalume provided details of the "national service" plan and requested assistance for implementing it in a meeting with MONUC human rights officers November 13, attended by PolOff. Kalume explained that the plan involves 337 vagrants, including 215 men, 35 women and 87 children taken into custody in the early morning hours of November 12.

(Note: According to a MONUC human rights officer, police conducted the round-up in a neighborhood unaffected by the November 11 violence, beginning at 3 a.m., arresting anyone they encountered, including a journalist who was later released, without attempting to determine whether they had been involved in the November 11 incident or had criminal records. End note.)

¶4. (SBU) Kalume reported that the men and boys will be transported to Kanyama-Kasese in Katanga, where the men will perform agricultural labor and the boys will attend school and train for agriculture. He said the women will be sent to Menkow, a village outside of Kinshasa, to work on government-owned farms. Kalume created a national service program under former president Laurent Kabila. According to a former participant, the program has not been in operation for several years, and the Kanyama-Kasese site is largely abandoned.

¶5. (SBU) Kalume said the GDRC will provide the program with mattresses, blankets, and \$1 per day per person for food. He appealed for contributions from international partners, including tents, tractors, agricultural supplies, and school books. He also asked for assistance to cover transportation

costs to Katanga. MONUC human rights officers said they would need to visit the site to determine its suitability before any discussion of funding could occur with partner NGOs.

¶6. (SBU) MONUC human rights officers claimed that Congolese law does not allow for transfer of individuals without trial, particularly without their consent. Kalume said the Prosecutor General had assured him the men could be arrested as vagabonds. He dismissed the idea of filing formal charges, conducting investigations, or holding trials on the grounds that those arrested were "incorrigible." He also promised to "get their consent" but contended that many were drug addicts who could not give consent, so the government "must help them."

¶7. (SBU) Kalume agreed to delay the plan for two days to allow MONUC and UNICEF access to the 87 minors in custody. UNICEF will attempt to locate their parents or to place them with local NGOs. A MONUC human rights officer noted that transfer of children without parental consent is also illegal under Congolese law. Kalume said that "any parent who wouldn't want their child to receive an education is reprehensible."

¶8. (SBU) Comment: It is thought that Kalume and Liwanga, both former military men, were named by Kabila last month in part to ensure order in the capital during elections. Transporting some 300 Kinshasa "shegues" is clearly designed to send a message to the criminals and gang members among Kinshasa's 20-30,000 estimated homeless of the consequences of participating in violence. Unpaid farm labor and forced transfer to the interior of the country will not address the

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real social issues that have given rise to the "shegue" problem, however. Moreover, a number of previous attempts to relocate other "shegues" have met with failure as government funds ran out after a few days or weeks. End comment.  
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